

20250406 RAISING OF LAZARUS

The Raising of Lazarus and Resurrection Sunday (Easter Sunday) are book ends. And there between the two will be the Triumphal Entry of Jesus on Palm Sunday. I have chosen to speak on three major biblical texts for our Resurrection season this year. There is always a bit of pressure on a preacher to say the right things during this season of the year. Many people attend church during this season who are not regulars. So, I think the words that we speak are important words. There's the tendency for the pastor to think that if he gives an exciting enough sermon, folks will come to salvation in Christ. But the truth of the matter is that the Gospel is the Gospel. It is not dependent on who is preaching. Our prayer these three weeks should be that both believers and unbelievers will listen to the whispers of God and take away EXACTLY what they're meant to take away.

So this morning, I'm going to read the text of the raising of Lazarus (who incidentally was really named Eliezar - just like one of Aaron's sons), and we're going to ask ourselves two questions. "Why is this in the Word of God," and "what can we learn from this passage by looking at the actions, reactions, and conduct of the people named in the story?" For those reading the written sermon, I'll put a small asterisk in the text reminding me of something we might want to observe at that point in the text. I'll read a few verses and then do my best to bring out those observations after each portion.

11 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany*, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was that Mary who anointed the Lord* with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³ Therefore the sisters sent to Him*, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."*

⁴ When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was*. ⁷ Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again.*" (John 11:1-7, NKJV).*

Let us pray.

We are introduced to Eliezer. That's is Lazarus' real name in Hebrew. Lazarus is a Greek rendition of his name. The name is familiar because you might remember that this was the name of one of Aaron's sons (Aaron was the first High Priest). The name Lazarus in Hebrew means **"God is My Help."** Lazarus was born for such a time as this. His name pretty much summarizes the entire substance of this chapter. You see, when Lazarus died and had been in the tomb for four days, there was no one that could have helped him except for God.

We find Lazarus living in a place called Bethany. So, out of curiosity, what does "Bethany" mean? In Hebrew it means "house of the poor or afflicted." So, here we find a fellow named "God is my help" (I'll add "my only help") who is living in a place called "house of the afflicted."

If we get nothing else from this sermon today, let us each realize that we all go through life living from time to time in the “house of the poor or the afflicted,” and there is NOTHING that can really help us except for the “help of God.” I don’t know how or why they ended up living in the “poor house” so to speak, but that is where they lived.

The disciple John is, of course, writing this AFTER the event so he tells us that this is the very same town where THIS Mary, the sister of Lazarus, was the one who had taken the alabaster vase in Simon the leper’s house where she filled it with spikenard and anointed Jesus’ feet with it. When some of the people were indignant because of the value of the anointing oil poured out, Jesus answered them.

⁸ She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. ⁹ Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” (Mark 14:8-9, NKJV).

Isn’t it amazing that this very morning, some 2,000 years later, we’re talking about Mary and what she did? Mary had taken nard, which was an ancient herb used for medicinal and religious purposes, and had anointed Jesus’ feet with it. It was very costly. It might be the equivalent today of about \$30,000 dollars (the average wage of a working person for a year).

On finding Lazarus sick, the sisters sent a message to Jesus to fetch Him. He was down over the Jordan from Jericho (in the modern-day country of Jordan), and it would have taken Him at least a day or two to walk to Bethany. When Jesus got the message, He curiously told the disciples not to worry as Lazarus was “only sleeping.” The text tells us that He stayed two more days in that place. This purposefully meant that He was three days away. Jesus, in sort of a cryptic way, is saying that there is something different about this sickness, such that in it God would be glorified through what was about to happen in Lazarus’ life. This reminds us that so many times we cry out to God in urgency for help “right now,” but He seems to delay for reasons that we do not know and cannot understand.

Jesus then told His disciples that they were to go up to Judea again. This probably upset and shocked them because if we read the account in Matthew, Mark, and John, Jesus had left the area with the religious leaders intent on killing him. To return there was to return to great danger.

⁸ The disciples said to Him, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?” ⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” ¹¹ These things He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” (John 11:8-11, NKJV).*

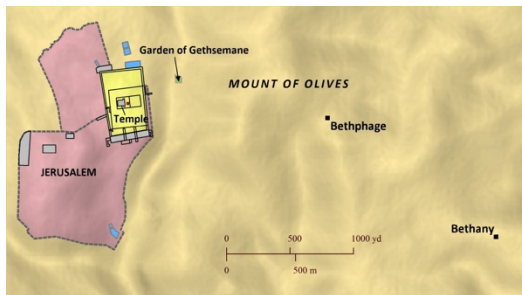
This business about light and day seems confusing, but what Jesus is doing is telling His disciples that both the day and the night are ordained by God, and when we are doing what HE wants us to do, we are walking in the light. When we walk as children of light, we will not falter

or fail or stumble because we can spiritually see what God wants us to do, and we will do it. He then uses the mid-eastern euphemism that Lazarus is “sleeping,” meaning that He has died. He adds, “but I go to wake him up.” As I read this, I was thinking that unless Jesus returns prior to your and my death, there will come a day when each of us will “sleep.” And glory be to God, Jesus will say, “My friend Faber sleeps, but I will go that I might wake him up.”

¹² Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” ¹³ However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.” ¹⁶ Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.” (John 11:12-16, NKJV).

Jesus then comes right out with the reality. He says that Lazarus is in fact dead, but He is glad that it has come to this because in seeing what is about to happen, His disciples will believe. A lot of times, we read a comment in the Bible, and we sort of just blow past it. I think this comment by Thomas is in reality sarcastic. He was saying something like, “Oh wonderful, let’s ALL go back down there now so we can ALL die with him.” They were going back into a danger zone and Thomas couldn’t figure out why they would do something so stupid. This is the heart attitude we have when we can’t figure out what God is doing in a situation, and we think that it just doesn’t make a bit of sense in light of what is happening in the present. I know this. I have been right there many times.

I Am the Resurrection and the Life



*¹⁷ So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. * ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. ¹⁹ And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. **

*²⁰ Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. ²¹ Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. * ²² But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” ²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴ Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”*

If you look at the map, you realize that this is VERY NEAR to the heart of Jerusalem. Jesus was moving into the area where He would be killed. He knew this. Martha left home, and she met up with Jesus wherever He was on the journey. And she did what we all do. She basically blamed Him for not getting there in time to save Lazarus. It is easy to blame God when

we find ourselves in trouble that we cannot explain. It's a little odd that the dialogue goes on because surely she had heard the stories of how Jesus healed people without even being where they were (like the servant of the Roman Centurion). Like many of us, she is conflicted. Her MIND and intellect know that Jesus is able to do anything, but her EMOTIONS are telling her that He's not done as much as He could have done to save the situation. She truly doesn't believe in her "heart" (Hebrew concept of where the mind and the emotions meet). Jesus then states, "Your brother will rise again." She understands this with her mind that Jesus can, in fact, raise Lazarus from the dead (conceptually), but her emotions haven't followed her mind to point of believing He can do it in THIS moment.

There's a bit of a lesson here. We too often accept a certain theological principle about God (let's say His sovereignty), but we don't follow through on that understanding with our emotions. Our mind might tell us a truth, but our emotions are all over the place, and we are a basket case. Note that Jesus moves the conversation from a "theological possibility" to a personal possibility. He says that HE IS THE RESURRECTION. This reminds us that, in the end, it is not our theological beliefs that will save us, but it is listening to Jesus saying, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."* (John 11:25, NKJV). In the end of it all, it is not our abstract belief in some theological position that will save us. It is understanding the JESUS HIMSELF IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. IF WE BELIEVE IN HIM, EVEN IF WE PASS THROUGH DEATH, WE WILL LIVE! We must reach that point where our mind and our emotions meet, and they both know with assuredness that JESUS CAN AND DOES DO WHAT HE SAYS HE CAN DO.

*²⁸ And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." ²⁹ As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. ³¹ Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." ³² Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."** (John 11:28-32, NKJV).

Mary, too, gives into her emotions and ends up in the blame game. She lets Jesus know that if He had gotten there in time, it all could have been different. We are all so prone to see a way that God can solve a problem, never waiting to see how He Himself intends to bring a solution. We are myopic. We see it our way, instead of trusting and letting God do it His way. You know, His way is always so much more beneficial. It is such a relief when we stop trying to pretend that we are God.

*³³ Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. ³⁴ And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" ³⁷ And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"** (John 11:33-37, NKJV).

Much has been written about this tiny verse that contains so much. “Jesus wept.” Instead of me trying to pontificate yet another opinion on what it all means, let me just point you to what scripture says about the empathy and sympathy that He has for us.

“¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted [think tested and tried] as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16, NKJV with authors notes in brackets).

He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows our every need. He hears our every cry. He gathers our every tear. He sympathizes with each and every sorrow that we experience.

Lazarus Raised from the Dead

³⁸ Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” (John 11:38-39a, NKJV).

The Greek word used here is only used four times in the New Testament. It is "embrimaomai," often translated as "groaned," but it is a much stronger word than just being super sorrowful. Jesus is internally stirred up and outraged at the result of sin and death. I like to think of it as a primordial groan. God in the flesh was standing there experientially knowing all of the fear, sorrow, terror, dread, and emotion that we each feel when confronted with our own death and/or the death of our loved ones. It was never ever meant to be this way. Yet Adam and Eve sinned and rebelled, and sin entered the world. And thus, so did death with all of its ugliness.

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” ⁴³ Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” ⁴⁴ And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.” (John 11:39b-44, NKJV).

I think a take-away from the account is that each of us is in a place of affliction. We are in our own Bethany. The older I get, the more amazed I am at the illness, affliction, and difficulty that we seem to see all around us. Before my recent illnesses, I believed that being sick was the outlier. It was the exception to the rule. I now think and understand that in the human experience, being sick and afflicted is the rule rather than the exception. We are all in some sort of affliction much of the time, and we are all “Lazarus.” Why are we Lazarus? Just remember his real name and know that like him, “God is our only help.” We’ve gotten ourselves into this condition by rebellion and sin, and the suffering is sometimes almost unbearable. But our present affliction is just for a moment, and it will be followed with an eternal weight of glory (2

Corinthians 4:17)! We do indeed have certain theological truths that we hold on to. They can certainly give us some degree of hope to hold on to. But to live life and to live it abundantly, these beliefs must meld into and spill over into a complete trust and belief in Jesus himself with all of our hearts. This allows us to experience God in our mind and our emotions. Jesus is telling us that He is the Resurrection and that He will indeed come for us when we too “fall asleep.”

He did indeed overcome death. We don’t need to fear death and dying, because it will all be just for a moment. And in that moment of our transition from death unto life, Jesus will say, “Our friend (insert your name) sleeps, but I go that I may wake him/her up.”*

The great message for us here this morning is that Jesus isn’t just the Resurrection, He is YOUR AND MY RESURRECTION. That’s His promise and I believe it. This is how He has conquered death and dying. We must believe this with all of our heart. There is peace in that trust. The Prophet Hosea saw that day coming. He didn’t know exactly of whom he was speaking, but he said,

*¹⁴“I will ransom them from the power of the grave;
I will redeem them from death.
O Death, I will be your plagues!
O Grave, I will be your destruction!
Pity is hidden from My eyes.” (Hosea 13:14, NKJV).*

⁵⁴So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”⁵⁵ “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55, NKJV).

Trust Jesus’ words that He spoke to Martha. ²⁵ *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.” (John 11:25, NKJV).*

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.